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HOW CAN WE CREATE AN INTEREST IN OUTSIDE READING IN OUR GERMAN CLASSES AND HOW DIRECT IT?¹

My remarks on this subject are based on experience with a class of eight Anglo-Saxon students in third year German. They were required to read one book in one school term of ten to twelve weeks, making a total of three per year. These books must each contain a minimum of twenty-five standard pages. They reported to me weekly, orally and in English. An incentive was offered for further voluntary reading in that 2 per cent. on the six weeks grade was given for each book read in addition to the one required. All seemed to enjoy the books read and two people (25 per cent. of the class) read additional books; one girl adding 6 per cent. (88-94) to her grade by reading three additional books, and one boy adding 4 per cent.

From the above I have drawn the following conclusions about outside reading:

First, it must not be work to the student. The purpose we have in view is to make the student enjoy the reading so much that he will later read of his own free will. Now, if we make it so difficult for him that it becomes repugnant to him, we have defeated our own purpose. Therefore, the least possible amount must be required of him and as many incentives as possible offered for him to do voluntary reading.

The training that we should have in view for the student is not that he assimilate an active speaking or writing vocabulary, but that he get a passive reading vocabulary that will not only awaken in him a desire to read German but the ability to do so with very little difficulty. To this end his reports should be in his mother tongue and should deal with the story or characters, description, etc.

The students should have very careful instruction from the teacher on how to read. They should be told never to translate, and to use a vocabulary or dictionary only when the meaning of the

¹Paper read before the German Section of the Wisconsin Association of Modern Foreign Language Teachers at Oshkosh, Wis., May 14, 1916.

sentence or paragraph depends on that word. If a student gets the general meaning of a paragraph, that is all that is necessary. The student should read only when he has several hours to read in. To that end it is well to have the reports on the first school day of every week. Knowing that he must report, the student will probably read on his two holidays immediately preceding.

One of the things upon which the success of outside reading greatly depends is the attitude of the teacher. He should try to make the student feel that now they are not in the position of teacher and student, but that they are co-readers of an interesting book. The student should not feel that he is giving a report but that he is having a conversation with the teacher about something in common. It would be well if the teacher at the beginning of the term or semester bring a number of books into the class room and spend part of the period exhibiting the books and saying a few words about each. Later after the student has picked out a book to read he should report to the teacher what book he intends to read. The teacher can then suggest another book if the one selected should be too hard or unadapted to the student wishing to read it. The teacher should be sure at each report that the student's idea of what he has read is clear in the student's mind. At these reports the teacher should strive to enter into the spirit of the story, to share with the student the lively interest which the student has acquired in the book, and to try to awaken in the student anticipation and curiosity as to what is to come.

So I would conclude from my experience that the four essentials for creating and directing an interest in outside reading are that the work should be easy and interesting, the end in view literary rather than linguistic, the student should not translate except when absolutely necessary to get the sense of a paragraph, and the teacher should make himself a co-reader with the student.

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